

S. M. Melch
with compliments of
the writer
May 31st 91

Reminiscences

OF THE

Village of Cooperstown

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BY

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PREFACE

Preliminary to the little paper which will be presently read, some courteous allusion must certainly be in order to one whose presence with us was ever as warmly welcomed, as his absence will hereafter be keenly felt and sincerely regretted.

*Dr. John G. Wight was, if I mistake not, one of the original founders as he has since been one of the staunchest supporters of this organization.

As a citizen, in all regards exemplary; as friend or neighbor, loyal and true; as a scholar, critical, polished and exact; as instructor, well equipped for his high calling by exceptional acuteness of intellect; by generous acquaintance with belles-lettres; by a justly discriminating taste; by sound literary judgment; and lastly, perhaps chiefly, by a more than German diligence which left nothing of value ungarnished in a field where

*Late Principal of the Cooperstown Union School, and now in charge of the High School at Worcester, Mass.

the fastidious but keen-eyed gleaner rarely fails to light, here and there, upon gems of the first water.

Such a man, truly a man of letters, lost to us, Worcester has gained. Nor will New England at large be any the poorer, nor Boston herself any less "The Hub" for his coming. Let us unite in wishing him and his family, in their new home, unalloyed happiness, and for him personally, all the rewards which a laudable ambition may rightfully covet.

REMINISCENCES
OF
COOPERSTOWN.

REMINISCENCE! Significant word! embracing perhaps within its narrow limits more of pleasure and of pain than any other in the English language. And how widely variant, in different individuals, are the powers of memory or of recollection! When quite lately assured by an elderly friend that he could recall with distinctness an incident which occurred when he was but three years of age, credulity was taxed to its limit. Stimulated, however, by that remarkable experience, I made for myself a desperate plunge into antiquity, peering so much further backward than Bellamy ever did, as all upon a sudden to find myself, apparently, on the upper floor of Noah's ark, making calculations for "Phinney's Calendar or Western Almanac." Wild and vain imagination!

Very possibly some gentlemen present, whose hairs are whiter than mine, or some ladies who were on visiting terms with Noah's family and who are not on that account the least bit sensitive about their age, may be willing to remember that the weather was about that time extremely unsettled; so much so, in point of fact, that between the roaring of the elements without, and the howling of wild beasts within the ark, accurate scientific computations were simply impossible.

I therefore resolved at once to commence my retrospective glance about 5,000 years after the flood—the greatest event of antiquity—and about 100 years before that greatest event of modern times—the late political earthquake—whose subterranean rumble is still, to persons of a slightly nervous organization, quite painfully disturbing.

Let us now, first of all, advert for a moment to the physical changes which time has wrought in this vicinity. Before ever the woodman's ax had been laid at their roots, how majestic, yes, well nigh sublime, must have been the aspect of our lake when its winding margins were fringed all round-about with grand old pines, whose trunks averaged two or three feet in diameter and whose tops vied with each other in towering skyward! Such, in his early boyhood, for so my father has often told me, were the conditions—a vast preponderance of stately evergreens well nigh overshadowing the deciduous trees, with which they were gracefully intermingled, thus imparting to the landscape an almost Alpine wildness.

How a transformation so complete has since been brought about, may be sufficiently explained by the simple statement that Orrin Peabody was paid by Tracy Kellogg—father of the late Garrett B. Kellogg—the sum of \$500 for removing the pine stumps only from the few acres of land now constituting the northern portion of James B. Jermain's handsome lake-shore lawn. It may also be remembered by some who are present that within the past fifty years there stood on what are now the Court House grounds, a magnificent group of pines, not one of which was less than three feet in diameter, and from one hundred to one hundred and fifty feet in height. It was a royal "coterie" of aboriginal forest monarchs—a topographical feature of the Empire State. Its destruction at the hands of the lumbermen was, at the time, and will long continue to be, deplored by all who look with a feeling of almost reverential regard upon such ancient and honored landmarks.

There stood also, on the eastern lake shore at the water's edge, and just above the quarry clearing, what was distinctively known as "The Pine Tree." In girth and height it was a mammoth, unique and solitary, its dying top all moss-tangled, its giant arms snapped off here and there by the hurricane—some at the wrist, some at the elbow joint, and some at the shoulder-blade—its monumental trunk riven by the bolts of heaven, and stained with the drip of a thousand storms. Hoary but now vanished patriarch of the old-time forest, idolized friend of my boyhood, hail, and farewell!

Directly opposite this imperial pine, in about 60 or 70 feet of water, the ardent disciple of old Walton, was wont to drop his tempting lure, with good hope of exceptional spoil. For here it was that all the salmon trout, wrongly yclept "sockdolagers," were supposed to congregate by instinct; seeking perhaps, the friendly guardianship of this venerable old Indian Chief, literally—"last of the Mohicans!"

Yet still, though so greatly changed, the general tone of the landscape remains exceptionally picturesque and beautiful. The eastern mountain side with its wild, thickly verdured slopes, contrasting finely with the diversified meadow and wood-land of the opposite shore.

Taking it all in all, the placid pool we love so dearly has a setting not wholly unlike nor any wise inferior, save in the height of its surrounding hills, to that of Loch Lomond or even of Loch Katrine itself.

There have indeed been occasional, yes, very occasional, aspects of our lake which are recalled as among the most delicious experiences of my life. When, of a serene June day, just at noon-tide, all the elements at perfect repose, the lake, with its placid bosom lying as in a dreamy sleep, I have seen those great burnished fleeces poised in the sky above, yet all floating by reflection in the depths below, and the inverted forest, with every leaf and twig minutely reproduced, pointing downward through the polished flood, as if to a new heavens and a new earth, then of a truth, there has seemed to be revealed to my spiritual vision a glimpse

of the far away "sea of glass," the "fields of living green," and the "gates of pearl" opening into the "city of our God, whose streets are paved with gold." And all this too amid a silence that might be felt, and which it were sacrilege to break.

Gazing upon, or even recalling such a scene, is it surprising, is it not, because of something better, nobler, higher, than mere sentiment, that one's eyes become suffused with tears—tears not unmanly, not unwomanly, not enforced by either pathos or passion—tears all unbidden, save by that mysterious eloquence with which the great Artificer's handiwork does sometimes make its mute but over-powering appeal to the keenest susceptibilities of the human soul? Upon such passing glories, because of their rarity, their transient nature, and their incomparable loveliness, is it strange, to pilfer the dainty phrase of another, that "memory dwells with the sweet insistence of sadness?"

Let us now take some note of the multitudinous and therefore well-nigh indescribable festivities of which for more than a century our lake, with its quiet nooks and jutting headlands, has been the pleasant theatre. From the cumbersome old scow of antiquity, with "Joe Tom" in command, to the commodious and well-appointed steamers of to-day, each successive season has but repeated itself, until those who have danced, frolicked and feasted at Three-Mile Point alone, must certainly be numbered by tens of thousands.

On a certain occasion—my impression is that it was during the incumbency of Rev. Job Potter—the Uni-

versalist Church was organizing a Sunday School picnic and the children had gathered at the church in goodly numbers. The sidewalk was thronged. A procession was formed, headed by the ice-cream cans, together with sundry huge baskets, all appetizingly displayed. Just as the caravan, if such it might be called, was about to move, a small-sized Universalist, stirred doubtless by generous impulse, hailed young Dick, a small-sized Presbyterian, who stood on the opposite side of the street gazing with assumed stoicism on the fascinating pageant. "I say, Dick, halloo! come up to our Universalist picnic. We're going to have ice-cream and cake and pie, and lots of good things." But to this cordial invitation the redoubtable Dick, thrusting his clenched fists deep into his pockets, and stretching himself up an inch or two beyond the average, responded, at the top of his voice: "No, sir-ee! I believe in a hell!"

What followed defies description. Probably the Universalist Church never received, certainly not in my day, a more withering blow, nor the Presbyterian faith a more triumphant vindication! It was also at this particular juncture in human affairs, that a very near approach was made to ideal Christian unity, for Universalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, believers and unbelievers, rich and poor, white and black, red, green and blue, all united in one harmonious burst of merriment over this exceedingly funny theological fulmination.

A very shrewd suspicion prevailed at the time that,

later in the day, stimulated perhaps by what his eyes had looked upon in the morning, young Dick found his way by land to Three-Mile Point, where his conscientious scruples were either stifled or stuffed with a superabundance of those same heretical viands which, but a brief hour before, had been so contemptuously spurned.

Touching educational matters we have the following deeply interesting and suggestive record taken substantially from "Cooperstown and Cooper." As early as 1795 an effort was made to secure a County Academy. The subscription list for this purpose contains 42 names, and the amount raised was \$1,441, showing an average of \$33 for each family in the village. This example of liberality and public spirit highly commendable in itself was, half a century afterwards, worthily imitated by the establishment of the Cooperstown Seminary; and still later on by that of our "Union School," which is conceded to be a model of its kind, one of the very best in the State.

In connection with this institution it is certainly a pleasant thought, that not the children of the rich alone, but of those whose palms are calloused by daily toil, are here all alike enabled to secure for themselves the prize of a solid practical education. And let it not be forgotten that such an education is in itself a capital; more valuable than any other, because, unlike any other, inalienable. Parents, whatever else you may neglect, neglect not to give your children this precious boon. *It may* save them from poverty; *it may* bring

them to affluence; it *will* bring them to honor, and it will open before them the widest possible fields of usefulness.

Touching our local journalism, there is in my attic a file of the *Otsego Herald*, edited and published by my grandfather, Elihu Phinney. It was the first paper published in Otsego County. Its first issue bears date April 3, 1795. Its motto was

"Historic truth our *Herald* shall proclaim,
The law our guide, the public good our aim."

It was about 12x18 inches in size, a single weekly sheet of blueish tint and dimly printed; the subscription price \$2 per annum, one-half cash, balance payable in quarterly installments! The latest news recorded on this third day of April was from London January 6, from Holland December 28, 1794, from Charleston, S. C., March 4, from Boston March 16, from Philadelphia March 23 and from New York March 25. Evidently, from these statements, "rapid transit" was in its early infancy.

The following extraordinary but *bona fide* advertisement appears on December 3, 1795: "To be Sold! A likely, healthy negro wench, of twenty-two years of age. For particulars inquire of the printer."

From the somewhat stately prospectus I make the following quotations: "The productions of the Politician, the Wit and the Moralist will be a grateful and acceptable offering; and the sons of Genius are invited to make the *Otsego Herald* the depository of their essays. Letters of intelligence are particularly solicited. Pieces

of humor and select scraps will be thankfully received. The agricultural interests of our country will ever be cherished by the editor as the *primum mobile* of individual happiness and national prosperity. The federal Government will be venerated as the potent protector of our dearest rights, the guardian of our national honor, the dispenser of impartial justice and the best barrier against usurpation, anarchy and oppression. The progress of science as well as agriculture is westward and we felicitate the worthy sons of industry, who have converted the 'howling wilderness'

"Where nothing dwelt but beasts of prey,
Or men more fierce and wild than they."

into a fruitful field abounding with all the necessities, most of the conveniences and many of the luxuries of life."

This little sheet, discontinued in 1821, has since been succeeded by the *Impartial Observer*, 1808; the *Cooperstown Federalist*, subsequently and now the *Freeman's Journal*; the *Watch Tower*, 1814; the *Examiner*, 1854; the *Tocsin* or *Republican* of to-day and the *Otsego Farmer*, a non-political sheet, established within the last few years.

Among other things which have passed away, and of which, aside from a few faint traces, naught is left but "reminiscence," is "The Village Improvement Society." To this organization (which let us hope may some day be revived) we are indebted for the twenty-five years' lease of Three-Mile Point, having yet nine years to run. This lease, for a mere pittance, guarantees to us, and to all our neighbors, the quiet and un-

disturbed enjoyment of this charming retreat. Owing, however, to complications arising from adjoining ownership, and other causes, its future is, we regret to say, rendered somewhat uncertain. Let us hope for the best.

To this society also, we owe it, that at an expense of nearly \$2000, Otsego Lake has been stocked with 1,500,000 fish of 8 different varieties. Whether this interesting and costly enterprise shall eventually prove satisfactory or disappointing, must depend, not upon any individual, but upon you, fellow citizens in the mass, who are supposed to embody public opinion.

Had it been sedulously guarded and cared for in the past, it would already have added largely to the prosperity of Cooperstown.

As to the old time general aspects or conditions of the village, running backward 25 years, we observe with pride and pleasure, marked and highly creditable changes. In the matter for example of public buildings, water supply, illumination, sewerage, highways, pavements and cross-walks, advances have been made of a thorough and substantial character. Literary societies have sprung up with so much vigor among both young and old, that Boston herself is said to be trembling even now at the prospective loss of her "hub." This disaster may possibly be averted by such timely aid from Cooperstown as our friend Doctor Wight would, if so disposed, be abundantly qualified to render.

Religious organizations too, have multiplied to such an extent that the millennial day seems not far remote

when we shall have two churches for every inhabitant—each church contributing in proportion to its financial strength, to the support of said inhabitant.

Glancing next at the central portion of the town, we notice with grateful delight that several long standing eye-sores have been, or soon will be, transformed into beauty spots, whilst the rehabilitated Bank Building, with its valuable and constantly increasing library and elegant gymnasium opposite, so complete in its equipment, reveal a truly generous and Christian regard for both the moral and physical welfare of our youth.

Then turning to the western suburb, so proudly extended, and really so very beautiful, we have renewed evidence of refined as well as independent architectural taste, involving also a lavish expenditure of money.

But of all local reminiscences none perhaps will be more delightful than those connected with our Hospital and Orphanage, two beneficent plants whose ever-blooming flowers of Christian love and charity have not ceased to exhale their sweet fragrance and to diffuse their gracious influence, through all the passing years. May these twin benevolences, and all like them, continue to flourish and expand until not a single suffering one within reach of their enfolding arms shall have sighed in vain for relief, and until every orphan child shall on bended knee, thank heaven for having supplemented the saddest of all human desolations with something so near, aye, so *very* near akin to parental love and care.

Turning now from this part of my subject, I ask you

to join me in this fervent aspiration—that the sunshine of perfect amity and good neighborship may ~~ever~~ fall unclouded upon a spot where, from earliest boyhood until now, it has ever seemed to me that good dame nature had with lavish hand, with cunning device, and in her very daintiest mood, essayed to outdo herself and succeeded perfectly.

My remaining pages will be devoted to personal recollections and anecdotes of three eminently distinguished men; Samuel Nelson, John A. Dix and James Fenimore Cooper, all for so many years our fellow citizens, and to whose great talents and public services Coopers-town is so largely indebted for her world-wide fame.

Justice Nelson, or as more pleasantly and familiarly known to us, Judge Nelson, was a rare example of physical and mental development. Of lofty stature, massive frame and noble mien, his presence was everywhere commanding. And yet withal, so suave, so affable were his manners that perhaps no other citizen was more generally beloved than he. Making no pretense to high classical attainments, but possessing, as he did, an intellect of the very first order, buttressed by strong native sense, and powers of analysis and discrimination far beyond the average, he had all these elements of strength well curbed by inflexible uprightness and a judgment sound, calm and dispassionate.

Thus armored, he was not long in reaching a seat on the bench of the Supreme Court of this State, and afterward of the United States, which august tribunal was both graced by his presence and honored by his

legal erudition. An attempt even to review at this time any part of his public career would be irrelevant.

Only a friendly word or two in passing. As a neighbor, he was ever kind and carefully regardful of others' rights. On one occasion when he and the writer were owners of adjoining farms, an incursion of cattle occurred, involving the hired men in a quite angry altercation. Hard words were passed, and without the knowledge of either principal a poor man's cow was impounded, an arrest perhaps made, and some expense incurred.

As the blame was wrongly imputed to me, I immediately addressed a note to the judge asking him to make an investigation, which he promptly did, and very soon afterward sent me a message that the fault was entirely his, that the fence had been repaired, the impounded cow released, an apology made to the owner and all expenses paid.

This incident, trifling in itself, reveals nevertheless in a pleasant way those finer qualities of fairness and equity by which his character was so distinctly marked.

If not in his pure and stainless life, which were ample of itself, Samuel Nelson's enduring monument will be found in those high judicial decisions which, like those of Marshall, Taney and Miller, must long carry with them the weight of international authority.

Of John A. Dix, as statesman, Senator, General, Governor and Secretary, we only know that in all these several capacities the distinction which he achieved was

due to a rare combination of qualities which the word symmetry may fitly suffice to interpret. Mildness, suavity, firmness, courage, eloquence, rare scholarship and a wide acquaintance with general affairs—of all these elements of power and influence Gen. Dix held undisputed possession.

Although somewhat slighter in stature, he was, like his friend, Judge Nelson, a man of distinguished personal presence. In any circle, even the most aristocratic, his fine head, delicately-chiseled profile, benignant eye and dignified carriage, partly that of the soldier, but rather that of the polished civilian, would have attracted instant notice. He was for some years owner and occupant of "Apple Hill," where, upon the present site of "Fernleigh Mansion," stood his home, a plain white wooden structure, afterward occupied by Major William H. Duff as a military school of cadets. Later on it was removed, and now stands on Main Street nearly opposite the Court House, revamped into a double dwelling house.

In that military school occurred several ludicrous incidents, which, as one of the surviving veterans, I shall venture to describe, calling on my venerable contemporaries, Messrs. Keese and Bowers, to support me promptly in any false or exaggerated statements that may be made, promising them, in return for such civility, a good fat place on the "pension list." Among our number was one whose *sobriquet*, for some reason not easily explained, came to be "Biddy Wilkins," a smooth-faced, fat and jolly youth, but somewhat slow

of motion. Sleeping, as we did, five or six in a room, and on separate cots, it was customary, especially on zero nights, for the last one up to extinguish the lights. On this particularly memorable night, one of the winter's worst, the truth of history compels me to relate that Paul Fenimore Cooper was the first to secrete himself with a chuckle between his blankets, the writer, to his shame be it told, following close in order.

But, alas! poor Biddy Wilkins, as usual, brought up the rear. Giving the light an extinguishing puff, he posed hastily on hands and knees at the foot of the mattress. Then, by way of celebrating the occasion, he undertook to perform a somersault toward the head of his bed. It was worse than a dead failure. Just about midway of the brilliant gymnastic feat his too rotund corporosity tipped over sidewise, crashed against and entirely through the window-sash, rolled out on to the roof of the piazza, thence down fifteen or twenty feet to the bank below, thence through snow-drifts from three to six feet deep and onward and downward toward the Susquehanna, *en route*, as we might say, to Philadelphia.

With the thermometer some degrees below zero and blowing a blizzard at that; with no stancher or more comfortable craft in which to undertake the voyage than a few yards of muslin, and with nothing under the moon to keep him warm but his own life's blood oozing from dissevered arteries, you may rest assured it was not long before the bleeding, half-frozen acrobat had been fished from the drifts and in the friendly arms

of his comrades, borne again to his couch. A surgeon was called, the gaping gashes in his thigh, freed from splinters of wood and glass, carefully stitched together, and just before sunrise all was again serene at military headquarters.

Not long after this occurred another incident, less tragic in character, and which, that a blank be not left in our local annals, is here recorded. The corps of cadets numbered one, McKibben by name, who was a born mischief-maker. He had small eyes, black as jet, set far back in the head and closely resembling a pair of highly-polished buck-shot. These wild-cat organs of vision seemed to be ever peering toward something dimly outlined perhaps to his imagination, yet still not certainly discovered.

All his leisure time—and he had no other—was fully occupied in either doing or concocting something that ought neither to be done nor concocted. On Monday, for example—more likely on the sacred day preceding—he tied together with a leather thong something like a dozen roosters, hens and chickens, and adding a heavy stone anchored them carefully under a log in the river, where all were found stone dead. On Tuesday with the same piercing optics he chanced to discover a nest of choice game-bird eggs, which Mrs. Duff had carefully concealed and was jealously guarding. Having first slyly demolished the sorry old sitting hen who had them in charge by wringing her neck, he deliberately flung all the eggs from the upper bank into the Susquehanna, suggesting that they would be “more likely to

hatch successfully in the mill-pond below." To the best of our recollection, most of them were prematurely hatched out on their way to the river through the trees.

But to the incident. In the centre of the floor, in the basement room, where we were obliged each morning to undergo military inspection, Major Duff had, for better security, deposited a two-bushel basket filled with fresh eggs, to be ultimately packed down for winter use. In the early morning, as we marched single-file down the stairs, McKibben espied the tempting lure. Preceding me, and coming to a sudden halt, he said, quickly: "Phinney, do you dare me to jump into that basket?" "By all means," said I. Thereupon, with a significant preliminary gesture, he made a tremendous leap from one of the upper steps, landing in the very centre of the basket, which, upsetting with a dismal crash, left him sprawling in a perfect pond of "raw material"—not an egg remaining uncrushed! Rising slowly from this unexpected bath he stood for a moment motionless and yet in a literal egg-stacy. Then, dripping at every pore, if not pouring at every drip, and cheered to the echo by all his surrounding compatriots, he stalked majestically up two pairs of stairs, lubricating each successive step, as you may imagine, with the golden liquid.

To return to my theme. The last time I saw Gen. Dix was at Trinity Church, New York, where, after the assassination of President Lincoln, his son, Dr. Morgan Dix, preached a most eloquent sermon appro-

priate to that mournful occasion. Sitting, as the Gen. did, directly in front of me, with side face distinctly in view, it was truly painful to observe the twitching of his features, the tremor that agitated his whole frame and the evidently violent struggle he was making to control his emotions. Probably Gen. Dix's most enduring monument will consist of those fifteen memorable words: "If any man attempt to haul down the American flag, shoot him on the spot!"

Next and last, Fenimore Cooper! To sound that name anywhere within the range of these surrounding hills were little else than to challenge to his weird echo one who never yet gave back any other but this honest reply: "Natty Bumppo, Natty Bumppo, Natty Bumppo!" After Webster, Everett, Bancroft and Bryant have exhausted the repertoire of elegant, eulogistic phrase, the attempt to say anything fresh of Cooper would be idle indeed. Having chiefly in mind however, the younger portion of my audience, my aim will be rather to give some idea of his personality—adding a few incidents or anecdotes revealing more of his inner nature.

Knowing him well and meeting him almost daily for years, he seems now to stand before me a man of colossal port, of brawn as well as brain, his massive frame knit together as with cords of steel. His head, of noble contour, set firmly and proudly on giant shoulders, had a peculiar and incessant oscillating motion. His eyes, too, of blueish gray and very expressive, were, like his head, singularly volatile in their movement—seldom at perfect rest.

His dress was always simple and inconspicuous. Meeting him on the street, one's first thought would be that he had encountered a man of marked individuality—a man of great physical power and of intellectual force as well. It was said of him, probably with truth, that when a midshipman he was able to lay any man on the ship flat upon his back in two minutes.

So graphic were his powers of description, so vivacious his manner, so expressive his gesticulation and so sympathetic the spirit of his humor, that as a story-teller he stood without a rival. I say "stood," which is literally true, for he always told his stories standing, or rather while pacing to and fro.

One of these, with which he more than once made my father's store a scene of merriment, is here related. A Connecticut farmer—Connecticut, mind you—had a blooded calf which, after a brief conference, he sold for say \$100 to a traveling purchaser, who agreed to call for his purchase on the following week. Next day to another transient customer, with much fresh palaver—tempted undoubtedly by the increased offer—he sold the calf over again for \$200 cash in hand, the new buyer also bargaining to call for his property on the following week. Most inopportunately both buyers chanced to return on the same day and at the same hour. The situation became embarrassing. Each desired to see his calf. The farmer desired to see nobody. Finally, when fairly cornered, he said: "It was a mistake, gentlemen, on my part to sell this calf twice. I felt it deeply on short reflection, and in order to prevent any

hard feeling toward me personally or any sharp altercation between yourselves, we had the calf killed last week and have eaten him up!"

Of the great novelist's playful humor, innumerable examples might be given. Let one or two suffice. On a certain Sunday I was sitting by chance at the head of my uncle's pew in the Episcopal Church, Col. John H. Prentiss, editor of the *Freeman's Journal* occupying the wall seat, and a mischievous lady cousin sitting between. Mr. Cooper, as warden, was passing the collection plate. Espying the colonel and myself, he took deliberate aim at the two luckless Presbyterians. Marching with slow and deliberate step in front of the chancel and entirely across the church, he stopped first at our pew, resting the plate noiselessly on the top of the pew door, straightened himself to his full height and stood motionless awaiting contributions—which did not come. Having nothing to give, I gave nothing. Col. Prentiss, being in the same predicament, made no sign, but, with a dismal hem of discouragement, readjusted his spectacles, crossed his hands over his gold-headed cane and fixed his gaze steadfastly on some object apparently one or two miles away. After a lapse of what seemed to me half an hour, probably not half a minute, Mr. Cooper stooped, placed his lips close to my ear, and said with a mischievous smile: "Can't you give us a little?" Embarrassed to a degree, my reply was: "I haven't a red cent!" Thereupon he lifted his plate and moved majestically on his way. I need hardly remark that this little incident was but the prelude to a good deal of subsequent amusement and repartee.

There was in former times a quite persistent and I may add somewhat malicious effort made by his critics to prove that Mr. Cooper was by nature of rough fibre, well-nigh a stranger to those delicate perceptions which distinguish the man of true feeling. No possible imputation could be more unjust. Fearless, downright, peremptory, aggressive, he may have been, finding pleasure at times in mere oppugnation, yet no heart could at its very centre be truer to every gentle instinct. Let the following touching incident suffice to confirm these words. On a certain occasion, entering the room unannounced, I found him lying at full length upon his back on the parlor floor, with a basket of cherries by his side. Upon his chest and vainly endeavoring to bestride the too portly form, sat his little grandson, to whom he passed the cherries and who, in turn, evidently with childish glee, was dropping them one by one into his grandfather's mouth. The sympathetic smiles that played over the features of both child and man during this sweet and gentle dalliance were something not easily forgotten.

From this fascinating picture I turned away delighted indeed, and yet with moistened eye. Perhaps it may not be irrelevant for me to add here that within a few months after this both man and child had passed "beyond the smiling," aye, and "the weeping" too.

Despite all his strength, there was, I think, in Cooper's mental constitution an element of credulity, as an abstract quality surely more noble than distrust. By it he was drawn many years ago into singular public

prominence. Adopting with much enthusiasm and with no attempt at concealment, his belief in animal magnetism and clairvoyance, he caused public meetings to be held in the old Court House where, evening after evening, those extraordinary theories were freely aired. On one of these occasions a pious Ethiopian subject had been duly magnetized, and pronounced to be both clairvoyant and absolutely insensible to pain. While Mr. Cooper was descanting eloquently upon this wonderful change, the aforesaid African, rolling up his eye-balls and displaying all his ivory, sprang spasmodically into the air, and then tumbled spasmodically back into his seat. It was a great mystery, upon which, possibly, light is just now for the first time thrown. Harvey Perkins, a man of intelligence and who was also a believer, had a young friend who was not, and who disputed him at every point. Perkins finally said: "So, you won't admit that the darkey is insensible to pain?" "Never, no, not for a moment," was the reply. "Well," said Perkins, "here is a darning needle, four inches long. Take this with you to-night and at the first opportunity thrust it slyly for a full inch into his thigh. If he flinches, I will give up; if not, you will believe." "Most assuredly." But, my friends, the African "flinched" and the manner of it has just been described.

Notwithstanding this untoward interruption, these public exhibitions, which, if not highly scientific or instructive, were at least intensely amusing, continued to be quite largely attended. Now, after fifty years of

guilty silence, comes a confession. Had the gentleman from America who now stands before you never been born, the gentleman from "darkest Africa" had never been punctured.

Possibly, a trifle like the following may not be without interest. When a mere lad, dining at the Hall one day with his son Paul, my playfellow, I passed my plate with knife and fork upon it for a second supply, when, from Mr. Cooper at the head of the table, came this brusque reprimand: "My boy, never leave your implements on the plate. You might drop knife or fork in a lady's lap. Take them both firmly in your left hand and hold them until your plate is returned." Whether "good form" or not at the present day, I have never since failed to heed the sensible injunction.

But perhaps the most interesting episode in Mr. Cooper's earlier life was his famous debate some fifty years ago with Hon. Gerrit Smith, the latter speaking in behalf of immediate abolition and the former of colonization. The two gentlemen were intimate friends. At the same time let it not be forgotten that the issues to be discussed were live issues, the most exciting of all that period; issues that had stirred the blood and fired the passions of our people all the country over. And yet, so calmly and so kindly were they now discussed, from beginning to end of an exhaustive debate, that not a single acrimonious word was spoken. Nothing like it, nothing equal to it, was ever heard in Cooperstown. Although but fifteen or sixteen years of age at the time, the impression made upon my mind was

indelible. Both gentlemen spoke without notes, and I shall never forget the smile of incredulity, if not of regretful surprise, which passed over the faces of his crowded audience when Mr. Smith drew out his watch and said: "I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for the patient courtesy with which you have listened to me for these two hours and thirteen minutes." Mr. Cooper's address occupied about half that time.

During all this protracted debate the audience listened with riveted interest. Not a person left the room. At its close the two gentlemen walked down Main Street arm in arm to the "Hall," the home of Cooper, where they dined together, and no doubt sumptuously.

Where now shall Cooper's fittest memorial be found? Daniel Webster says: "He has left a name behind him which it is ours to cherish and to honor, and so far as marble or bronze can perpetuate it, let marble and bronze be employed." In the graceful shaft of Launitz the marble, and in medallion bust the bronze, have been already utilized. Both are inadequate. To my seeming there stands for Fenimore Cooper another and a nobler monument—a monument "*perennius ære*," more enduring than brass—a monument which, outlasting every graven record and all posthumous fame, shall crumble only at the crack of doom, disappear only in earth's final catastrophe! It is the wild crag on yonder mountain side, beneath whose weatherbeaten but friendly screen, brave Natty Bumppo greased his rifle, petted his hound, broiled his venison, tanned his buckskins and sheltered his burly frame from the storm.